

## **ESRC Seminar Series 2013-1015**

### **Older Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Trans People: Minding the Knowledge Gaps**

#### **Seminar Two: September 10<sup>th</sup> 2013 – Oxford Institute of Population Ageing**

#### **‘Intergenerational Issues and LGBT people – Current Initiatives and Future Directions’**

#### **Reflections from June Lowe, Chair of GRAI, GLBTI Rights in Ageing, Australia**

This seminar, part of a ‘boutique’ series in the UK, drawing together academics and others interested in older LGBT issues, drew me from Perth (West Australia) to Oxford (UK) to compare the thinking and ideas on intergenerational issues being generated in our respective countries.

It is fair to say that this work is embryonic in both hemispheres, and as such, all the more exciting. It contributes to the wider debate about creating age-positive societies and carves a special niche in addressing the particular needs of elders who have grown up being in a world hostile to their identities as LGBT men and women.

In a world where equal marriage is (becoming) a reality, there is still light to be shone in the darker recesses of traditional institutions, particularly in aged care services, where heteronormativity and/or Victorian asexual attitudes are commonplace. Despite rapid social change, the battles are far from over, and achieving LGBT-inclusive aged care occupies much of the research and policy change space.

However, this seminar looked beyond aged services – an innate acknowledgement that if our intergenerational and multigenerational support systems were much stronger, the need for formal care provision would be greatly diminished (while reaping a huge social enrichment dividend).

The morning speakers set the scene for our thinking about intergenerational work. Antony Smith (Age UK) and Catherine McNamara (Gendered Intelligence) presented their experiences in running three distinct LGBT intergenerational programmes in Camden (an arts project), Stockport (an advocacy project) and Leicester (a history project). Through diverse avenues they aimed to improve understandings and relationships between younger and older LGBT people and to develop knowledge and pride in LGBT heritage.

The Leicester (history) project trained younger LGBT people to interview older LGBT people, eventually expanding to form a substantial local LGB archive. The London, Stockport (advocacy) project again trained participants in research methods and employed a ‘speed dating’ approach to talk directly with service providers. This was very empowering for participants and produced a toolkit for local service providers. The Camden (arts) project ambitiously condensed over 4 weekends, produced film, visual art and music with 30

participants of mixed age, gender and sexuality, to culminate in an exhibition and performance event.

Although the projects had different foci and quite different outcomes, there were some key commonalities: the challenges and ultimate successes of unifying diverse groups across age, sexuality and gender divides and overcoming stereotypes; the benefits of positive role models in ageing and social gains in sharing experiences; and, critically, the attraction of learning new skills and in focusing on doing something together across the generations.

However, disappointingly, none of the projects had the capacity to develop on-going informal support networks, as the time-frames were too short. Given the undoubted talent in project design and production, the apparent lack of sustainability is disappointing, and perhaps points us away from a 'project' approach if we are hoping to establish meaningful intergenerational relationships.

Both inspired and cautioned by these depictions, seminar participants were then invited to spend the afternoon designing their own intergenerational projects. Two groups suggested film as a medium – one 'Connecting LGBT Generations' suggesting a skill share with participants learning to facilitate and carry out filmed portrayals of their own lives and service provider experiences. The second, 'Screening in, Screening Out' proposed a virtual film club, with participants engaging both individually or in groups with films with an LGBTQ focus in different decades and in different cultures. A third group proposed 'Care Share' a not-for-profit organisation offering brokerage for an intergenerational time bank, while a fourth suggested creating virtual community through shared on-line biographies and a life course approach.

The groups also paid attention to potential funders and operational details for their projects, so it would be interesting to see if any 'get legs', or are perhaps the seeds for other, later emerging ideas. This was but one afternoon and one small group of people, so clearly there is great potential for LGBTQ intergenerational and multigenerational projects. It was noted that Camden is the only local government that has an intergenerational officer: an astonishing lack given the profound social good that can emerge from this movement.

The true medium- and long-term benefits of fora such as this are tantalisingly beyond our view. Connections were made and/or strengthened, concepts floated, initiatives planted: the room was certainly rich with ideas and resonated with the supportive energy that we instantly recognise as the precursor to starting something new. These are early days for LGBTQ intergenerational work, and this seminar established some important groundwork to enable this movement to flourish.

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